

[Connecticut Clockmaker (Botsford)]

No. 18

ORIGINAL [MSS.?] OR FIELD NOTES (Check one)

[FOR.?] Living Lore in New England.

(Connecticut)

TITLE Connecticut Clockmaker (Botsford)

WRITER Francis [Donovan?]

DATE 11/23/38 [?] [FT.?] [80?]

[CHECKER?] [?] DATE

SOURCES GIVEN (?) Interview

COMMENTS

Field Worker Francis Donovan,

Thomaston, Connecticut

[????]

Field Copy

for

LIVING LORE IN NEW ENGLAND

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Subject

Connecticut Clockmakers Informant -

Arthur Botsford, Native born.

80 years of age. Retired.

Mr. Botsford worked as a machine operator for Seth Thomas Clock Co., Thomaston, Conn., for a period of sixty years. Retired spring of 1938.

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11/17/38. SETH THOMAS CLOCK COMPANY (Employees of this company were selected as our clients for investigation because of the age of the company, its influence in the community, control over political, economics and social life, and reputation in the trade for both workmanship and attitude toward employees.

Long term service in this plant has been the rule; the personnel were almost always of either native Yankee or German parentage, steady, independent, thoroughly reliable workers. Mr. E. R. Kaiser (German), present first selectman of Thomaston, worked for "the company" for over forty years; Arthur Botsford (Yankee), another Thomaston man we have interviewed, has sixty-five years service with Seth Thomas Clock Company behind him and has retained a remarkable store of local legend and industrial folklore.)

Thomaston in a village of 4188 population in the valley of the Naugatuck just north of Waterbury. Once known as Plymouth Hollow, Thomaston was chosen by Seth Thomas (1785-1859), as the site for his clock shop in 1812. Mr. Thomas owned the stores, residences, controlled the church and the town hall, and even the little brass mill that rolled sheet metal for his clock works. He dominated the local scene until his death and, even

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after Seth died, the Thomas family ran the town. Aaron Thomas, Aaron's son, Edward, and then William T. Woodruff were successive heads of the

2

The Thomaston school children used to chant:—

“Ashes to ashes Dust to dust If the Case Shop don't get you The Movement Shop must .” And they were right. Arthur Botsford, Litchfield Street, Thomaston, Conn., retired from active work in the spring of 1938, after a clockmaking career that started when he was fifteen and continued for sixty-five years. Most of his time in the mill was spent as a machine operator and he ran them all. Botsford owns an 1852 1855 (?) , map of Plymouth Hollow, boxes of spare parts for clocks and watches, old tools and outmoded clocks that keep better time than any modern timepiece. He knows the reason “why” behind almost every shift in process, in company attitude toward the worker and the trade. His memory is clear and his mind is alert. Botsford's hangout is at the firehouse, where other old cronies gather to discuss the problems of the machine age and to regretfully relive the good old days. This old worker has preserved a “time book,” over seventy years old, that he salvaged from a truckload of old records the janitor was carrying to the scrap dump. This old book is (includes) a journal of Botsford's own service with the company, carrying his work record from the day he entered the mill the first time on down to the year when he reports more efficient time keeping records were adopted.

Every employee entered his name in that old Day Book, made notation as to the time he worked and what his job was for each day. Botsford runs his stubby finger over the entries and will relate exactly what happened on a given date, and why.

“Look here,” he says. “That shows the exact date McLaughlin's boy died of typhoid fever. He worked up till Wednesday.... the rest of the days are blank after his name. Here's the last day we worked eleven hours. Then the new law went into effect. And here is the daisy of them all ”

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Botsford pointed to a blank page, dated sometime in April, 1873 "All gone young and old," it reported in fading ink. "That meant that P. T. Barnum was playing in Waterbury."

Botsford rambles, an one expects an old man will, but he converses freely about his WORK and the affairs of the town. He will not unlimber about his personal affairs, nor does he care to inform the reader as to his activities "off the lot."

Botsford speaks, from here on: —

"My father came here in '47 from South Britain (Conn.). I can remember hearin' him tell about the first railway through these parts and how he and some others walked all the way from South Britain to down around Seymour, or some such place, to see the first train. My Dad 4 worked for Sanford four years after he came here and then he got in the clock shop and worked there till he died."

"There were two places in town and one in Plymouth where they used to make clock parts not the complete article, understand but just parts. I guess they sold to Seth Thomas, yes, I presume likely that was the principal market. One of the factories was owned by Sam Sanford over there on the corner of the street that's named after him "Sanford Avenue."

"They made pendulum rods, wire bells, and verges there. I remember when old Sam got killed. Up off High Street there used to be a quarry and Sam and Ed O'Connell were up there quarrying out flag stones. I worked over in the Movement Shop at the time, and from the top floor you could see way over the hills. All that part that's Judson Street, and Walnut Street and upper High Street now was just bare hillside and it was the fall of the year; from the top windows of the Movement Shop you could see all the people scurrying and gathering like ants. Looked as if the whole town was there."

"They was both killed, Sam died right away and Ed. O'Connell died before they could git him home. We went up afterwards to look the place over and there was still people there

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talking and looking, gathered in little knots. Seems as though they had cut from the wrong side, in order to git done a little quicker, and they didn't git out from under in time and 5 the stone fell on them.

“But I don't know's you want to hear about all that. Then there was Ransom Sanford and his sons made verges in a little place up on Railroad Street; and then up on the top floor of the Shelton carriage shop in Plymouth they manufactured verge escapements for clocks — but I don't know who was in charge.

[???] start here #

“Seth Thomas — you talk about fables and I'll tell you what always used to pass for gospel truth but I think its a fable — Seth Thomas, they said, came here afoot from Wolcott, where he was born, carrying all his belongings in a bandana knotted at the end of a stick. And they said — though I don't say this couldn't be done, mind you — they said he whittled the first clock he ever made with a jack-knife — whittled the whole darn thing entire.” [?]

(At this point Mr. Botsford produced a tiny peach stone, whittled into the semblance of a monkey. It was a creditable piece of work and he was obviously proud of it.)

“If a man could do that,” said he, “Why couldn't he whittle clock parts?” [?] “Anyway, I don't know what Seth's circumstances were when he come here, but before he died in 1859 he owned pretty darn near the whole town. I can remember my Dad telling about the big general store Seth ran up near the center of town. You paid for skip to page [?] 6 what you got once a year. At the end of that time, some of them owed him money, the ones that worked for him, I mean; they'd et more than they'd earned. Sure, he took It out of their wages. Oh, he sold to others, too, man didn't have to work for him to trade there. The post office was kept in that store, too.

“It burned down, the whole building, in 1877. Seth died in '59. And when he died he owned plenty, not only buildings, but land and stock.

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The side hills was dotted with his sheep and cattle; he owned all the land around Marine and Litchfield Streets and down Grand Street and through the center of the town.

“Of course, there was other big landowners, too, had parcels here and there. There was the Alcotts, and R. T. Andrews, and the Blakeslees, and across the river was the potter place — they had a factory over in back there, the Potters did, where they manufactured guns — didn't know they was guns made in the early days in Connecticut, did you? — and then where MaGrath's is was the Marsh place and the Woodwards and the Judsons on High Street. But all they owned wasn't a patch on Seth's property.

“Seth had Aaron, and Seth and Edward and three girls, near's I can remember. Bill Woodruff's mother was one of the girls, she was a Thomas.

And Ed Thomas had Walter and three girls, and all these kind of married with the other prominent families in town. Miles Morse, him that ran the clock shop I told you about the other 7 day, he married one of them. They called him “Squire Morse.” After he give up the clock business, he started up the knife shop, down to Reynolds' Bridge, and he lived in that big house they call the Mansion, right across the river, you can see it from the main road. Afterwards he built the big place in the center of town that was torn down this summer.

[?] “I guess I told you most the history of the company that I can remember. In the early seventies, they bought out the A. S.

Hotchkiss Tower Clock Company of Williamsburg, N. Y. For a while they manufactured these clocks and called 'em the A. S. Hotchkiss tower clockmade by Seth Thomas, but after Hotchkiss died, he stayed with the company, you see, they dropped his name.

[?] “Now I remember they manufactured a clock for some South American country — I think it was Peru, or Bolivia, or Ecuador — anyway, they had to put that clock up in small parts, not to exceed a certain metric weight, and shipped in tin boxes, all soldered.

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They went by steamer to a point on the Amazon River and then by llama over the Andes mountains.

insert on [?] 11?] [?] “Each part was marked so's it could be put together in a monastery up there in the mountains. The monks had to do it themselves. I remember after it was up and running, the monks wrote a letter to the company officials telling how they'd got it 8 going. It was all in the papers, but I suppose most people have forgotten about it now. I don't remember what year it was. insert continued on L. 8 [?] “Then there was them two clocks they made for Colgate — the first one had a 40 foot dial and the second one a 50 footer. I think I told you about them. The folks in the Movement shop were certainly proud of them. They had a picture taken, I got it around here somewhere, with all the help lined up alongside the hands.

continued insert for [?] 11]

“You asked me about that entry in the time book concerning the beginning of the ten hour day —” Mr. Botsford got out his book and turned to the page on which it was written — “On the morning of Sept. 5, 1864, it was a Monday — the shop began to work 10 hours a day in compliance with the new law — I think it was a state law.

[?]

“Before the war (Civil), they could work the help any hours they had a mind to. The clock shop worked 11 hours a day, as a rule, and the cotton mill 14.”

The average rate of pay, according to several of these old timers whom I have questioned, in the seventies and eighties, was about twenty cents an hour, and that indeed, was considered “good.” One old fellow said he'd worked 11 hours a day as a teamster for the company at this wage, carting heavy brass ingots to and from the rolling mill, and thought he was lucky to get it. He said he paid only ten dollars a month rent, and other living expenses were commensurately low.

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Mr. E. R. Kaiser told me that his father, learning his trade in Germany, had had to get up at 4:30 in the morning, work until 6:30 AM without breakfast — then take a half-hour off for something to eat — work until noon and another half-hour off — and work until six o'clock at night.

“Seth Thomas as you know, came here in 1813,” said Mr. Botsford. “He built his shops and established his business then, but he acquired most of his property in the early thirties. Not many people remember now that the old man branched out into the cotton business at one time.

“The bell from the old Cotton Mill, by the way, made in Hartford in 1833, is still in the cellar of the old building that used to house the Thomaston National bank on Elm Street.

“Well, sir, they had to stop making cotton goods when the war broke out, and then they moved the clock metal works up 10 to the old Cotton Mill and still continued to make the cases in what is known to this day as the Case shop on South Main Street. Old Seth, by the way, used to buy his brass, but he couldn't get it when he wanted it. So he built the rolling mill, and that is now the Plume and Atwood Manufacturing Co.

[?]

“Not many people still remember that, either, and I doubt if you'll find many records of that transaction. It burned down in 1856, and was rebuilt the same year, and there is one shaft in operation today under the floor of that mill that was used in the original building.

There's something for you to write about.

“After that the death of old Seth Thomas in 185[9?], the mill as I said, passed into the hands of the Plume and Atwood Company. It used to be a treat for the people of this town — I can remember doing it as a boy — to go over to the mill and see the big engine. It was

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a regular walking-beam steamboat engine — imagine that — and they had stairs leading up to a little gallery where you could stand and watch it in operation.

[?] “Then sometime in the middle sixties they talked about making marine clocks. Some of the stockholders objected to the idea, thought they'd lose money on it — so they formed a new company — called it Seth Thomas Sons & Co., and they took the old sawmill in the west part of the town and built on to the 11 west wing. But the dispute got settled or arbitrated or whatever you call it and shortly afterward they merged into one company again.

[?] No [?]

“Marine clock? That was kind of a catch name, probably one of the earliest attempts at high pressure advertising. It was made with balance wheel instead of pendulum. They had a slogan for it printed on advertising cards about the size of a postcard. It read: “It stands up, Lays down, and Runs all the time.” They called it 'marine' simply because it would run on the oceans same's it would on land.

[?] “That's how the old Marine shop got its name, and the Thomaston Marine Band, organized God knows how many years ago — more than 50 anyway, and made up of man who worked in the Marine shop. They began making watches there in the eighties, but they discontinued the watches in 1914. Then they moved the metal working department from the Movement shop to the Marine shop until 1938, they moved the whole darn business down on South Main Street, under one roof.

“They started making tower clocks sometime in the seventies. They built the Centennial Clock in '76, the one that went to Independence hall, Philadelphia. The two big Golgate clocks are probably their most famous products.

[?]

“But first of all they made these.”

insert from [?] 7, 8 Then skip to [?] 13. 12 Mr. Botsford produced an [?] old wooden movement, of which he was obviously proud. I could take this clock today, and put a pendulum and a dial on it and start it and I bet it'd keep perfect time. It ain't any good as an antique though because it's a 30 hour and collectors don't want nothin' but eight days.”

“Did I ever hear the old clockmakers use their own special names for anything? Can't say's I did. They used to call cannon pinions “center sockets” and spring boxes “barrels” that's the sort of thing — but it didn't have any meaning.

“Yes, I remember Aaron Thomas and one thing that sticks in my memory is an example of the famous temper Aaron had. He used to ride back and forth between the shops on horseback — had a horse that had seen Army service and carried a big brand on its flank. I was coming along the street one day and I see Aaron stop to talk to one of his farm workmen. The horse wouldn't stand still and Aaron — he had a strap hung with clockweights he was carrying from one shop to the other — and he just swung it down and thrashed that horse till it behaved. He had a high temper — and in some respects he was a peculiar man.

“There's another thing I want to tell you about. Years ago there was a lot of deaf and dumb people working in the shops. Must have been as many as twenty or twenty-five of them. No, I don't know as they were any better clockmakers than ordinary folks.

13

Reason they worked there I guess in that Frank Crossman, he used to be superintendent of one of the plants, had a deaf and dumb brother and he kind of felt sorry for them I guess, and gave them jobs.

[?]

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"I've got a steel engraving here of Seth Thomas." Mr. Botsford brought out an album, turned a few pages, and pointed to the engraving.

Mr. Thomas, encased to the chin in what used to be called a stock, I believe, and with long white sideburns and white hair combed in bangs over his forehead looked like a character from Dickens. "I got it out of one of the company's old catalogs," Mr. Botsford told me. "There ain't many pictures, of old Seth around." he added proudly.

"No there's no Swiss clockmakers in town, and none that ever came here, s'far as I knows," he said. "But I tell you what happened after the Civil War.

[?] "A lot of Germans came here and distributed themselves around. Some went to Clock factories in Winsted and New Haven and some came here. They worked in this country quits a few years till they got the idea of clock manufacture, and then they started a big clock factory over in Germany. The Seth Thomas agent in London bought one of their clocks and sent it over here, and they found out it was patterned exactly after the Seth Thomas.

What's that? Yes, German clockmakers are good, [individu?]

closing par: taken from other Botsford material:

use one of the following; which do you prefer?

Then the Irish came in here they were treated by the old settlers just like their own. Aaron Thomas gave 'em the land for the Catholic church over across the bridge. Then the Scotch came, and the Germans, and they got a good reception, and then the Russians and the Polacks — they was all treated well and given jobs. We never had many Italians come in, and only one or two Jews, but they were not dominated or discriminated or whatever you want to call it.

OR

The English and the Irish came in here first, and then the Germans had then the Scotch and the Swedes, and then the Russians and the Polacks. We never got many Italian s families and only one or two Jews.

(I think the second quote fits better for our purposes, but I do like “dominated or discriminated or whatever you want to call it.”)

14

ally. But they didn't know anything about mass production. Oh, yes, I'll grant you German clockmakers know their business. They have to be able to assemble a clock before they can call themselves clockmakers. But they had to copy American manufacturing.

[?] “I saw the movement they sent over here, and that was in 1888. They say they had a monstrous big shop over there, biggest in the world.

add attached copy. Note [?]

“And I'll tell you something else young fellow (and by the way I'd like to understand that my name won't be used in connection with this stuff). Back in the eighties someone in Meriden invented a metal pinion to be cast with gears and wheels complete. They peddled it around to the clock companies in this section without success — nobody could see it.

[?]

“After a while a company started making them out in LaSalle, Illinois, and that company is now Westclox, which is the parent organization of General Times Instruments, which owns Seth Thomas. Figure that out. If Seth Thomas had bought that pinion maybe they'd still be making clocks on their own hook.”

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"The old Tavern barn stood up there where the Lyons block is now on Main Street, then later they split it up in two parts and made houses out of it and moved it down where the schoolhouse 15 now stands. It used to be run, they tell me, by old Aunt Hannah Williams, Gus Blakeslee's wife's mother, but hell, I can't tell you anything about it, because I wasn't interested much in taverns when that was standing.

"Tom Hart ran it later. It was a kind of combination tavern and hotel and livery stable and I imagine it was a great gathering place for the town sports in its day. After it was moved and made into a residence, Oscar Edner and Wehrle and Gates the postmaster all lived in it.

"Then of course there was the old hotel — the Thomaston house — that came a little later and the first one that I remember to run it was John Mullins. That was a popular spot for many years. There weren't a great many clubs in town. There was the Criterion club — but I never belonged to that — I remember hearin' something about that famous hoax that was pulled by some of them boys with an automobile battery — people thought 'twas an infernal machine — but I can't tell you the story in detail — you oughta get it from some of the others — they used to have same hot times at the Criterion club.

"I told you about old Seth Thomas' store that was in the Morse block Well, on the morning of July 5th, 1877, the fire alarm sounded — that old store burnt up and the big barn in back of it and fire gutted the whole block. They tore the building 16 down — the fire department did — they got five hundred people on the end of a rope and pulled and down she came.

"Lots of the boys was in Waterbury that night and they heard about the fire and came up to town on the steam engine. They sent a fire engine over from Hartford by railroad on a special flat car to help put that fire out. I guess it was the biggest fire we ever had in Thomaston.

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“There was a four horse stage used to run through town — did I tell you about that — ran from Litchfield to Hartford in the sixties.

Before they hit town — they used to change horses here — they sounded a bugle to let 'em know they were coming. That's a custom that the railroad trains later imitated — didn't know that, did you?

“Railroad trains had to fuel up at every station — used to have woodsheds right along side the tracks and load 'em up at every town. They stood over there by the tracks for years.

“Years ago we used to cross an old covered bridge that spanned the Naugatuck and go down into the meadow and across the railroad tracks.

My father used to tell about old man Fenn, who carried the mail from the depot to Seth Thomas' store, where the post office was. He tried it during a flood one time, and got carried several hundred yards down the river.

“There was a tight board fence in the middle of the bridge 17 and one on either side and I remember a tale about an Irishman who used to take a drop too much once in a while and always got as “light as a feather.” One night when he was as 'light as a feather' he jumped what he thought was the middle fence, but it turned out to be the end one, and he landed plump in the river.

“Down in the meadow they used to play ball, right where the casting shop is. I can remember sitting up on the bank, when I was a kid and seeing Thomaston and Torrington playing ball there, and they got into a hell of a fight.

“No, 'twasn't neither baseball nor football. 'Twas a game called 'wicket.' I guess they got it from the English cricket players 'cause it was almost the same. There was a difference, but I couldn't tell you just what it was. The bat was shaped like a spoon, and the pitchers wasn't called pitchers, but 'bowlers.' They had a wicket set up and they aimed for that.

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"Ain't nobody knows much about it now. They had a reunion of old Wicket players around here somewhere, a good many years ago. And don't forget in those days they didn't have no masks, nor gloves, nor shin protectors and the like of that. The best catcher they ever had here was Tim Duane, who caught barehanded. He was mayor of Chelsea, afterwards.

"I don't know what good all this stuff is to you, its just snatches of this that and the other. I can't remember dates and there's lots of important things I forget. What's it got to 18 do with clocks? [?]

"Social life in them days was largely connected with churchgoing. There wasn't any automobiles or movies. All the young folks used to go to church. A fellow'd meet his girl there and walk home with her — nowadays they got to go out in a car somewheres. What you need now is a half a pint and an old tin lizzie.

"There was more interest in lodges then. I've belonged to the Odd Fellows for 53 years. Lodges ain't what they used to be — too many outside interests. There was a few benefit organizations too, like the Aegis and the Workmen's — wasn't no compensation for shop injuries then.

They started the Shop Aid about 1890, and it run for a while, then it busted up, and then it started again. But it didn't pay much. "hen old man Wehrle lost his hand all he got was seventy-five dollars. I joined it when it started, but the next time they got it going, they set the age limit at 50 and that let me out.

"I thought I had something up here might interest you (rummaging around in a wall closet), "but I can't seem to lay hands on it. Lemme show you these." (Handful of old photographs.)

"These here are my cousins down in Arkansas. How'd I happen to have cousins down there? Well, I had an uncle was a travelin' man and he just happened to like the country and settled down there. This one here, she's dead now. Here's some more 19 relations —

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this little fellow here, he's grown up now and is professor of agriculture in the New Milford schools.

"I wisht I'd kept files, darn it, so's I could lay hands on what I wanted when I wanted it." (Mr. Botsford to interrupted by the appearance on his front porch of a boy bringing the evening paper. He hastens to the door.)

"What do the headlines say? I can't see them so good without my specs. That goddam Hitler — hangin's too good for that feller. Why don't he let them people (the Jews), alone?

"Tell you how I feel about that Norton book. I don't want anybody borrowing it, no matter how good care they take of it. Why don't they got it in the library, it ought to be there. It's called 'Etching in Memory of Charles Norton.'"

20

(E. R. Kaiser, Former Superintendent, Seth Thomas Clock Co.)

* * * * *

".... ... Yes, I remember the old Criterion club, and I remember the incident you speak of, but I'm not sure of some of the details. But here it is, near's I can remember.

Note [??]

"Seems old John Gross, who had the first car in town, took the battery out one night and brought it down to the club. He left it lying in a corner — and whether he did this with malice aforethought or not I can't say, but he certainly helped the matter along afterwards — and there it reposed until later in the evening when the boys began to gather for a round of pinochle.

"Well, just about that time there was a hell of a scare going through the country about these I.W.W.'s. They had blown up a building or something, someplace, or had got the

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credit for it anyways, and people were edgy every time the name was mentioned. To make it more interesting, a bum had come through town and had been lodged in the lockup the night before, and as you know the cells in the town hall basement are right adjoining the old clubroom — that's the barber shop today.

“One of the boys saw the battery over there in a corner, and of course it was the first such object he'd ever laid eyes on and he didn't know what it was no more'n if it was something from Mars, and the first thing come to his mind was the I W W's and their 21 dirty work. He raised a big hullabaloo about 'infernal machines' and got all the others worked up so's they were afraid to go near it, and those who were a bit timid just grabbed their coats and hats and went.

“Finally one of the braver ones, I can't just say who 'twas, got a pail of waters and he run over quick and doused the battery. Well all this time, old Johny Gross and some of the other maybe, that were in on it, were nearly bustin' trying to keep from laughing out loud.

“After it was dunked in water they all felt a little better, but then the problem arose how to dispose of it. Finally somebody hit on the idea of taking it up on the side hill, up in Bradstreet's cow pasture, and setting it off. For they were fully convinced it was a bomb, understand.

“So the next day, they all marched up there, and half the town with them, for by this time the news had got around. They carried it mighty carefully, and when they got it up there, they took it out of the pail, and attached a long fuse to it and somebody, I think it was (the late)

G. A. Lemmon, volunteered to set it off. The others gathered at a respectful distance and waited while G. A. lit the fuse and ran like hell.

Of course nothing happened, and after a while it occurred to them that they were being kidded and they went home feeling foolish. And Johnny

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Gross went up there that night and got his battery, but he didn't say anything about it till the boys cooled off a little.

22

"They were always playing tricks in those days. The Criterion club was known as a high class organization and their affairs every year were outstanding social events. They used to give a fair for the benefit of the library once a year. And when it was all over they threw a big party for themselves at the clubroom. They had a dandy turkey one year, prepared by Perley Jones' mother, roasted and stuffed to a turn, and they were getting the place fixed up for the dinner and left the bird on that back window sill. When they went to look for it, it was gone, and the Criterion club had nothing to eat but the fixings. Nobody ever knew whether it was taken for a joke or because somebody was hungry, but the town had a good laugh."

* * * * *

(Excerpts from an article appearing several years ago in the Thomaston Express local weekly: Bylined Willis B. George.)

"On the right hand side of the road, going north to Torrington, just this side of Fenn road, is a large three-family home, which goes by the name of the Sailor's Home. No one seems to know how this house got the name, the assumption being a sailor once lived there, but who he was or when he did so is a mystery to the present generation of Thomastonians. But this house is far more distinctive in an historical way for other reasons than that it bears his name. Well 23 over a hundred years ago, this building was a clock factory, and was later the home of other industries. It there for has a part in the industrial history of Thomaston.

Marvin and Edward Blakeslee, descendants of Capt. Thomas Blakeslee, one of the town's earliest settlers, erected this building by the river, to be used for the manufacture of clocks,

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a business in which they were already engaged. The Blakeslee name, therefore, is one of numerous others, such as Seth Thomas, Silas Hoadley, and Eli Jr., and Henry Terry. The Blakeslees carried on this business for some years, eventually selling out to Seth Thomas, who bought out or forced out in the process of competition the other local clockmakers, so that the Seth Thomas name is the only one of that early group perpetuated in the manufacture of clocks here today.

“Although Seth Thomas bought out the interests of the company, and the equipment, he centered the manufacturing in his well established plant in the center of the town. The former Blakeslee building became in turn the home of numerous other industries. The first was that of Jerome Woodruffs who built pianos and other musical instruments. A second manufacturer by the name of McCullom built organs there. An organ in use for years at the old St. Peter's church in Plymouth was one of his products.

Later manufacturing of quite a different type went on here. Carrington & Lamb made spools for thread and also spooled the thread itself.

Charles Johnson, who was the brother of the well known portrait painter, Horace Johnson, built machinery in this plant, and 24 a Nelson Bradley brought back the touch of Thomaston's best-known industry, clocks, by turning out verges.

“In due time, however, the place fell into the hands of owners who made a radical change in the use of the building, converting it into tenements. The building, which had stood by the banks of the river; was moved to its present position along the road.

“Unfortunately, the date of this important change is not known. A note by August Wehrle, to whom we are indebted for this historical data, states: 'Many a newly-married couple started housekeeping in this old factory, as the rents were small both in size and in price and a small garden plot was available.'

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“ Just as the former factory acquired an unusual name, the Sailor's Home, so the spot where it was built had a name to conjure with. This section was known at that time as Heathenville, a name which is used in many authentic records being that given as the location of the Blakeslee factory in Wallace Nutting's 'The Clock Book.' The origin of the name is as vague as that of the house, and whether there was any connection between the sailor and the heathen is not known, old-time sailors, having the name of having a wild lot.”

* * * *

(E. R. Kaiser)

“Thought of another story about the Criterion club since the last time I saw you. I'm not going to give you some of the details, 25 but I'll tell you the most important facts and let you piece it together. We used to have a man here in town was always trying to promote stock deals.

Note [Anecdote?]

“I'm not saying they weren't honest, but it's likely that he was misled on some of them. One of his pets was a gold-mine stock issue that he tried to peddle.

“He wanted to interest the men in town who had money, naturally, so he asked for permission to bring this mining expert to the Criterion Club to give a talk on the mine and a demonstration of the value of the deposit. You couldn't pull anything like that today because people are wise to all those old gags - and even then members of the club were too skeptical to put faith in it.

“Some of the boys got together and agreed to have some fun with the promoters. The local man brought his guest to town in the afternoon with all his paraphernalia, including the mine deposits, and they visited the club and left the stuff in a locker there. After they

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went out, some of the members opened the locker, and took out the sand that had the gold deposit in it, and substituted ordinary soil.

“The big demonstration took place that night, and, of course the mining expert couldn't find enough gold in his dirt to fill a tooth.

“And the lads that pulled the stunt kept egging him on, saying: 'There's a speck there!' and 'What's that shining there?' and so on. Mad?

They were madder than hell, the both of them.”

* * * *

(Art Botsford:)

“I been talking to Frank Hoyt about that old bell. Frank's been to see Gibbs (one of the company superintendents) and Gibbs is going to speak to the higher-ups about it— thinks probably we can save it from going to scrap after all.

26

“Frank says if we can got things started about makin' a monument out of it, he'll do the casting and engravin' and all for nothin'. That'll be is contribution to the good work, he says.

“You was down to the tower clock department last week, was you? Did they show you the old bell? It's over in the old building, that's right. I can remember climbin' up in the tower to look at it when I was a kid—that's our Liberty Bell, you might say.

“You find the record of that tower clock? You should have, if 'twas in the book. I can remember workin' on that shipment, packing' it in boxes, and I know they sent it over the mountains on llamas, don't let them tell you it was mules.

Library of Congress

"They made one once that was shipped to some foreign country and the boat sank, 'fore it ever got there. They had to make the whole thing over again, but of course it was insured.

"I guess I forgot to tell you about the one they made for the rich old fellow somewheres down on Long Island. You see that one on Woodruff's barn, that small one? Well, this one was just like it, made it for this rich old man, and he put it on his stable, where it would always be in sight whenever anyone wanted to know the time.

"Well, sir, one time his daughter had to catch a train somewhere—it was very important, wherever it was, and she was all packed and everything, ready to go, and she looked at the clock an the barn, and it said quarter to nine. So, she thinks, I've got plenty of time, and she sits down and begins to read a book. She looked at it a little while later and she jumped pretty near out of her skin, because it still said quarter to nine. The long and short of it was she missed her train—the clock had stopped. She called her old man, 27 and he got hoppin' mad. He went out to look at the clock and he found that a whole bunch of pigeons had roosted there and that's what stopped it. What did he do but run back into the house and get a shotgun and blaze away at those birds.

"I can see that darn dial yet, the way it came back. It was full of gunshot holes — a hell of a mess.

"Old man Gordon was in charge of the tower clock department, then, a good man on tower clocks. That one up on the church up in Plymouth — that's made of wood. He fixed that up when it went on the bum.

"What did you say? I didn't tell you about the old clock shop they used to have at the Sailor's Home? Yes, I forgot it, slipped up on that one, but I knew about it. I just forgot it that's all. The Blakeslee family. Yes, I knew all about it.

Library of Congress

"I told you about all the others, anyway, you'll find I didn't miss many of them. And say, I got something here, hasn't got anything to do with clocks, but I want to show it to you. It's over eighty years old." (Brings out an apple in remarkable state of preservation).

"Yessire, over eighty years old. It's stuffed with cloves. Used to be the fashion to stuff 'em and keep 'em Come up again, if I can help you out on anything."

* * * * *

(The appended clipping from the Thomaston Express is another illustration of the ramifications of the business which has carried the name of shrewd old Seth Thomas all over the world. In spite of the streamlining of the industry and the introduction throughout of modern methods of manufacture, distribution and promotion it is doubtful if it ever again will reach the extensive proportions it attained in years past.)

28

(George Troland, Yankee)

"Mr. Troland, an adjuster by trade, has been engaged for 35 years at his work in practically every clock factory in the state except that in Winsted. It was my thought that he might be representative of a peculiar type—the clock-maker who doesn't stay 'put' but who is constantly shuttling back and forth in an over-decreasing area of clock industry.

Opportunities for employment for this type, who might in the old days have been compared to the itinerant printer in many ways are rapidly narrowing and many are forced to remain where they are who would in more propitious "times" heed the call of greener pastures.

"Mr. Troland's son is an ear-timer and adjuster. I found them together. Said Mr. Troland:

"I worked in most of them. In Sessions, Ingrahams, Seth-Thomas, Waterbury Clock, New Haven—I don't know how I missed Winsted. I worked at the Waterbury Clock Company three times. In the old days it used to be easy to get job anywhere if you were a good

Library of Congress

clockmaker, and if your record was good you could always go back. Even if it wasn't so good, you could go back, if they needed a man. Some of them used to be pretty heavy drinkers. They'd go on a bat and wouldn't come back to work, and finally they'd just pick up and go to some other clock shop and get a job.

"I used to work with a guy named Gene Herbert, and he told me he had a chance to go to Japan once, what do you think of that 3/4 Seems he was working up in Waltham and this Jap came up there and wanted to have somebody go back with him and Gene was going to get the chance. They were to make the parts in Waltham and assemble them in Japan. But something went wrong, and it never went through.

"Than a couple of years ago, the Russians came over to Bristol to study clock and watch manufacture, and some of the boys got a chance to go to Russia. I don't know if any of them went or not, seems to me they did.

29

"I used to work for the Waterbury Clock Company before they started making Ingersolls. I saw old man Ingersoll many a time—he was a little bit of a short guy, kind of nervous and quick acting. Then they bought Ingersoll out.

"There used to be a lot of shifting around. I never got out of the state, myself, but I worked with plenty of men from the other big factories, Waltham, Elgin, Hamilton—if you were a good watch or clockmaker you could get a job in any of those places. You had to know your business, or you didn't get by."

(Troland Junior)

"Over at my place things are a little different. If a spring has too many coils here they call it a 'soft spring'. Over in Ingraham's they call it a 'stiff spring'.

(Troland, Senior)

Library of Congress

"Well, every shop is different. Over there the first wheel starts from the center; over here its from the escapement; [so?] that what's your first wheel over there would be your second wheel in Seth Thomas. You find little differences like that, but they don't amount to much.

It's confusing when you first go to work in a place, after you've been used to doing things in another way. But you soon get used to it.

(Troland Junior)

"We call the off-timers 'cuckoos'.

Troland Senior)

"A lad came to me one time and he said all ear timers were cuckoos. He said all you have to do is hold your finger up in front of them and they laugh."

30

(Off timers are clocks which have been timed and still are not precise. In other words they must be timed over again.)

(Troland, Senior)

"When I first worked in Waterbury, there wasn't any Lux Clock Company.